



AXE F A C T S

The INFO Source for GR Users

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A Brief History of Roland GR Guitar Synthesis

Part 2

In our last issue, we explored the first Roland guitar synthesizer, the venerable GR-500. This early synth definitely opened the minds of guitarists worldwide, as well as fueling further Roland research and development into guitar synthesis. The next systems Roland introduced were the GR-300, and its little brother, the GR-100. Released in the early 1980's, these two synths were significantly different from the GR-500 in several ways.

The GR-300 and GR-100 were not as much true synthesizers as they were glorified distortion processors. They worked by turning the signal from the guitar's divided pickup into a complex square wave, which could then be processed by a filter and an envelope generator to sound synth-like. Because they were not true synthesizers, the tracking on these instruments was flawless and they found their way into the hands of many adventurous guitarists including Jeff Baxter, Jimmy Page and Andy Summers.

Another major difference between the GR-300/100 and the earlier GR-500 was their basic design. The GR-300 and GR-100 were floor units; they had rows of foot switches which provided instant control over the sound modules. With just a few exceptions, such as the GM-70, the GR-50, and the SPV-355 (described below), all Roland guitar synths since the GR-300 have been floor units.

As an interesting side note, the GR-300/100 technique of directly processing the original guitar sound recently reappeared in the Roland VG-8, which through COSM and HRM modeling

technologies can produce advanced guitar and synth-type sounds with absolutely flawless tracking.

The early 1980's also saw the rise of the Roland G Series of guitars. (Betcha' didn't know Roland ever sold guitars...)

There were originally four models: the G-808, a double-cutaway, neck-through solid body guitar with two humbuckers and a 3x3 headstock; the G-303, which had the same configuration as the G-808 with a glued on set-neck; the G-202, a Strat™-shaped guitar with two humbuckers, a bolt-on neck, and a "six-in-line" headstock; and the G-505, which was similar to the G-202, but included three single-coil pickups and a trem bridge. These guitars were made by Fuji Gakki, the same factory which built guitars for Ibanez and Fender in Japan, and many guitarists noticed similarities to other Fuji instruments of the time, particularly models such as the Ibanez Artist.

At about this same time, Roland was developing many new models of analog keyboard synths, as well as sophisticated rack-mounted processors for guitar and audio use. These simultaneous developments combined in the SPV-355—a rack-mounted monophonic dual-oscillator pitch-to-voltage synthesizer covered with sliders and knobs. Unlike other Roland guitar synthesizers, this instrument did not use a divided pickup, but instead had a direct guitar input. By playing one note at a time, a guitarist could thus play the SPV-355 and generate true analog synth sounds. These units are rarely seen today, but they worked well, giving guitarists access to the synth technology of the time.

In the next issue, we'll explore the infamous GR-700, and its companion guitar, the space-age looking G-707.

The Roland VS-840 - EZ Digital Recording for Guitarists

Technology... Isn't it amazing how it's changed the way we approach music? It was recently called to our attention that about 67% of guitar players today own computers and have a working knowledge of MIDI. That's an incredible number, considering the fact that not long ago the average guitar player's most technical equipment ran along the lines of a Les Paul, a Marshall Stack, and a BOSS pedal! (continued on Page 2)

The Roland VS-840 - EZ Digital Recording for Guitarists (continued from Page 1)

Today, many guitar players still opt for relatively simple rigs when performing. But it's a whole new ball game when it comes to recording, as evidenced by the new Roland VS-840 Digital Workstation.

For those of you that aren't familiar with the VS-840, it's an 8-track digital hard disk recording workstation that includes 64 Virtual Tracks, a built-in 12-channel digital mixer with three bands of EQ per channel, a dedicated guitar-level input, and a built-in stereo multi-effects processor that contains hundreds of effects including COSM models of the world's greatest guitar amps and speaker cabinets. All you need is your guitar, a cable and the Roland VS-840 to have an entire digital recording and guitar workstation at your fingertips!

Just check out a few of the amazing features of the Roland VS-840. You'll see why this portable and affordable workstation is just right for guitarists.

Guitar Input - The VS-840 sports a dedicated guitar-level input located on the back panel. This input provides the proper impedance for the low-level signals coming directly from your guitar, making it easy to plug in and record.

Backlit Icon-Driven Display - Break out those candles. The backlit display makes this workstation easy to use even under dim light. Better yet, check out the helpful icons in the display. These intuitive graphics make digital recording even easier!

EZ Routing - This brand-new feature will guide you through each step of the recording process. Just answer some simple questions, select the appropriate icons, and let the 840 do the work for you!

Zip Drive - The Roland VS-840 features a built-in Zip™ disk drive for all audio recording and playback. You record your music directly to low-cost 100MB Zip disks, allowing you between 40 and 103 track minutes each.

Virtual Tracks - Each of the VS-840's eight tracks contain eight additional layers known as Virtual Tracks. This gives you a total of 64 tracks to record to and select or combine during mixdown! Think of the possibilities...

And the cool thing about the VS-840's Virtual Tracks is that you are not limited to these types of choices. Instead, you can record on all eight of the playback tracks, then use the Virtual Tracks to record more guitar solos and other takes, different parts, etc. You never lose your original takes!

Digital Effects - The built-in stereo multi-effects processor includes hundreds of different effects such as delay, reverb, chorus, and even COSM models of the world's most popular guitar amps! With COSM modeling technology—the same stuff behind Roland's VG-8 V Guitar System—you get 13 guitar amp models and 14 speaker cabinet combinations, including amazing simulations of a Classic Stack, Vintage Twin, or even Roland's own JC-120 Jazz Chorus Amplifier.

UNDO - With the Roland VS-840, there's no need to worry about accidentally erasing your work. Just press the button labeled UNDO, and it will get rid of the mistake, and bring back your original take! The VS-840 gives you 999 levels of UNDO or, as some producers would say, "999 chances to get it right!"

Digital Mixer - The VS-840 has a built-in 12-channel digital mixer with three bands of EQ per channel. This means your mixing can be done entirely in the digital domain so the sound quality remains superb.

Scenes - One of the unique things about the VS-840's digital mixer is that you can create and save eight entirely different mixes of the same tune, using totally different effects, Virtual Tracks, EQ, panning, and fader levels. You can store this information as a "scene" and access it at the push of a button.

Digital Editing - Don't let the easy-to-use interface fool you! The VS-840 has the ability to perform digital editing that would be impossible on conventional digital and analog tape recorders. You can cut, copy and paste section of audio very easily—just like a word processor! And a built-in Song Arrange function allows you to automatically arrange the sections of your song in any order you wish.

The Roland VS-840 really is fast and easy to use! You get eight tracks, 64 Virtual Tracks, a 12-channel digital mixer, digital effects, a guitar input, EZ Routing with an icon-based display, and a built in Zip Drive for recording your music—all for the amazingly low price of \$1395 MSRP!

But don't take our word for it. Check the VS-840 Digital Studio Workstation out for yourself at any authorized Roland dealer!



We love reader questions here at Axe Facts. In fact, we love them so much we send a **FREE T-shirt** to the reader with the best question each issue! So if you've got a question or comment, or if you want to stump the experts (these are our favorites), please write to us at Roland Corp. U.S., 7200 Dominion Circle, Los Angeles, CA 90040 Attn: Axe Facts.

Q. What's the difference between the GR-09 and your newest synth, the GR-30?

There are several differences. The GR-09 is a great guitar synth introduced a couple of years ago. Although Roland no longer manufactures this model, it's still very popular thanks to its compact size, great sounds and expandability. The GR-30, on the other hand, is the newest model in a long line of Roland guitar synths and has some killer features, most notably its Arpeggiator, which like a separate note sequencer for each string, and a Harmonist for intelligent harmonies using the synth sounds. Both the GR-09 and the GR-30 are approximately the same size, and use the same ultra-fast pitch detection system for flawless tracking. The GR-30, however, has more programmable parameters and many new onboard sounds.

Q. I'm using a GR-30 with an external sound module. The pitch bend is fine on the GR-30's sounds, but not on the other module. What's wrong?

This is a common problem. Different synth modules interpret pitch bend range numbers in different ways. For some modules, the number for unison pitch bend is 12, for others it's 3, for others it's 24. It doesn't matter what the number is, but it does have to be consistent between the two devices. Make sure that the bend range number being sent out via MIDI from your GR-30 is the one that the receiving module wants to see. This number will be in the manual of the module (with any luck). If you can't find it, you can always experiment; try starting with 2, 3, and 12.

Q. What's the difference in performance

between a surface mounted GK-2A and an internally mounted pickup, like the GK-2A Kit?

Good question. While there are certain small operational differences (the controls are slightly different), there should be no difference in performance.

Q. There are different types of chromatic settings on my GR-30. What's the difference between on1, on2 and on3?

You almost stumped the experts on this one! These settings are subtle differences, designed to help the GR-30 closely emulate real chromatic instruments, such as pianos, woodwinds, and others. In all chromatic modes on the GR-30, if you play a note and then bend it, the pitch of the synth will go up to the next half-step, or semi-tone. When you use "on1", if you play a note and then bend it, the note will shift up to the nearest semi-tone without retriggering. In other words, the note will not start again at the new pitch, but will sustain as if it had not changed pitch. In "on2", if you play a note and then bend it, the note will retrigger, but at the volume it was at when you reached its pitch. In "on3", the note at the new pitch will retrigger as if you had played that note, as opposed to having it sound by string-bending.

Looking for more GR-30 tips?

There's now an incredible Demo Video available for the GR-30 for just \$5.00! You can order it simply by calling us at 1-800-386-7575.

DIALOGUE

AN ONGOING CONVERSATION WITH OUR READERS

In the last issue, Dialogue gave some sample settings for different types of guitars using BluesCube BC-60 amps. We recently received some killer settings from Tony Pasko in Lake Zurich, IL and a great (and quite colorful) note explaining why he got rid of his Boogie and his 1979 Marshall and got a BluesCube BC-60 instead.

Here's Tony's "Funk Clean" BC-60 sound: Use Channel 1, set Bright to On, Crunch to Normal, Bass-6 or 7, Mid-10, Treb-12, Pres-11 and Rev-5. This is a very cool and useful funk rhythm sound and we recommend it highly. Thanks, Tony, for sharing this cool setting with us.



We have received more mail than we can print in this issue. There'll be more answers to your questions, and more useful information from readers in the next issue. Keep the mail coming!



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- New BOSS CD

Don't look now...it's the

BOSS

GUITAR EFFECTS CD!



AxeFacts is pleased to announce the availability of the brand new BOSS GUITAR EFFECTS CD. This CD is a combination CD-ROM/audio CD which contains all kinds of cool stuff—everything from audio demos of effect combinations to a multimedia version of the popular BOSS Guitar Effects Guidebook. Think of the possibilities: click on a pedal and see all its specs; scroll through the entire catalog of BOSS compact pedals and get the down-low on each one—all from the convenience of your home computer. If you're using the GUITAR EFFECTS CD as a standard audio CD, you'll be able to hear actual audio demos of every pedal, as well as some cool songs using the pedals in various combinations.

This great new CD is available now and best of all, it's only \$5.00! You can order it direct from Roland by calling us at 1-800-386-7575.

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